

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN McCAIN  
CHAIRMAN, SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION  
FULL COMMITTEE HEARING ON  
AIRLINE CUSTOMER SERVICE  
JUNE 28, 2000

- C One year ago, the Commerce Committee approved the Airline Passenger Fairness Act, which was enacted into law almost three months ago as part of the FAA reauthorization act. The Airline Passenger Fairness Act was crafted in response to widespread and intense public frustration with airlines' poor customer service.
- C Our legislation gave the airlines an opportunity to refocus their attention on basic customer service. The member air carriers of the Air Transport Association developed the Airline Customer Service Commitment. Pursuant to that industry-wide initiative, each airline developed its own customer service plan. Those plans were scheduled to be implemented fully by last December, but I understand that full implementation by all airlines did not occur until March of this year.
- C The legislation directed the Department of Transportation Inspector General to report to Congress on the effectiveness of the airlines in living up to their Customer Service Commitment. The first report is an interim one, and is being released today. The final report is due in December.
- C Although the Inspector General's findings are preliminary, the results show mixed success and raise many questions and concerns. Unfortunately, the report indicates that the airlines still have a long way to go to make significant inroads on the customer service front. The good news is that the Inspector General's interim report makes several thoughtful suggestions to help the carriers' customer plans work. Better yet, the carriers have time to respond to these suggestions before their final report card is in.
- C At a minimum, it is necessary for the carriers to heed the Inspector General's advice. What's at issue here are basic standards of customer service, not dazzling promises designed to exceed passengers' expectations. Air travelers need to know that the airlines are bending over backwards to meet and exceed these basic commitments.
- C For instance, customers should know that they have 24 hours to hold a seat at a quoted fare, even if the ticket is non-refundable. Delays should be communicated when they are known, not simply when the passenger shows up at the gate. And information on frequent flyer programs

should be useful enough to help consumers figure out the likelihood of redeeming their points for travel.

- C According to the Inspector General, the airlines are quick to blame their customers= dissatisfaction on the FAA and the air traffic control system. Delays related to bad weather and antiquated air traffic control equipment are indeed at the root of many customers= complaints. If the airlines truly believe that the air traffic control system is at the root of their woes, I urge them to throw their weight and momentum behind a serious, realistic plan for air traffic control reform. Otherwise, they will just be accused of trying to shift the blame.
- C As I said last year, I want and expect the Airline Customer Service Commitment to succeed. But if the airlines= voluntary effort falls short, I am committed to moving forward on additional, enforceable passenger fairness legislation. The Inspector General's December report will weigh heavily on our decision regarding a future course of action. In the meantime, I expect the airlines to fully comply with the recommendations of the Inspector General.
- C Several of my Committee colleagues and I have asked the Inspector General to go beyond his final report in December, and continue reporting on the airlines= compliance with their voluntary customer service initiatives. I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues on this important issue.